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ABSTRACT

In the midst of a growing national debate about the role of television as a de facto "sex educator" for young people today, this survey asked parents nationwide in the fall of 1996 about their views on kids and television. A random sample of 853 parents and children ages 6 to 15 were surveyed by telephone (the data reported here focus on a subsample of 421 parents with children ages 8 to 12). Parents were asked about how well they are able to monitor their children's television viewing; the amount of sexual content on television, particularly during programming in the early evening; and the influence they think television is having, if any, on their children. Results showed that 43 percent worry a "great deal" about the amount of sexual content their children are exposed to, and 28 percent are at least "somewhat" concerned. One out of five say they have seen an effect on how their child talks, acts, or dresses. Parents are divided over how well they think TV presents sexual issues, with 30 percent thinking sexual content is generally presented in an "informative or socially responsible way" and another 31 percent saying this is "hardly ever" or never the case. More than two-thirds say they are able to watch TV with their child at most only half the time; 85 percent have rules about which shows their child can watch. Nearly half say their child has at some point asked a question about sex, AIDS, or some other issue because of something they saw on TV. Finally, three-quarters agree with the concept of the family hour, and 72 percent say there are not enough shows on television appropriate for their child. (Presents each survey question and its results.) (EV)

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THE HENRY J. KAISER FAMILY FOUNDATION

CHILDREN NOW

A KAISER FAMILY FOUNDATION AND CHILDREN NOW NATIONAL SURVEY:

PARENTS SPEAK UP ABOUT TELEVISION TODAY

A Summary of Findings

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Methodology

The survey was designed by the Kaiser Family Foundation, Children Now, and Princeton Survey Research Associates (PSRA), and conducted by PSRA between October 3-29, 1996. A national random-sample of 853 parents of children ages 6-15 were surveyed by telephone. The data reported on here focuses exclusively on a sub-sample of 421 parents with children ages 8-12. The margin of error for the total parent sample is plus or minus 4 percent.

In addition, 164 children of the parents surveyed were also interviewed by telephone about their television viewing habits. These children were all between the ages of 10-12. The margin of error for the children is plus or minus 8 percent.

A second national random-sample survey of 1,010 adults, ages 18 and older, were interviewed by telephone by PSRA between October 30-November 3, 1996 on additional questions pertaining to television today. Included in this second survey was a sub-sample of 167 parents of children between the ages of 8-12. The margin of error for the total population in this survey is plus or minus 3 percent. The margin of error for the sub-sample of parents of children ages 8-12 in this survey is plus or minus 8 percent.

A Summary of Findings from *A Kaiser Family Foundation and Children Now National Survey: Parents Speak Up About Television Today*

In the midst of a growing national debate about the role and responsibility of television as a defacto "sex educator" for many young people today, the Kaiser Family Foundation and Children Now developed, in association with Princeton Survey Research Associates (PSRA), a survey that asked parents nationwide in the fall of 1996 about their views on kids and television. Parents were surveyed, among other things, about: how well they feel they are able to monitor their children's television viewing; their thoughts about the amount of sexual content on television, particularly during programming in the early evening; and the influence they think television is having, if any, on their children. This report summarizes the key findings with regard to the views of parents of children ages 8-12. The full text of the questionnaire and the responses are also included here.

In recent years, concerns about excessive amounts of violent content on television have sparked parents, policy makers, children's advocates, and others to call for more attention to what young children are exposed to in entertainment media. In the Kaiser Family Foundation/Children Now survey, many parents report being as concerned about the amount of *sexual* content on television today as they are about *violent* content. More than four out of ten (43%) say they worry a "great deal" about the amount of sexual content that their children are exposed to when watching television, and an additional three out of ten (28%) say they are at least "somewhat" concerned. By comparison, 39 percent of parents say they worry a "great deal" about violent content on television, and 36 percent say they are at least "somewhat" concerned. Most -- 79 percent -- say they have not seen any changes in their child's behavior due to this content, although one out of five (19%) say they have seen an effect on how their child talks, acts, or dresses.

Parents are divided over how well they think television presents sexual issues: 30 percent think sexual content is generally presented in an "informative or socially-responsible way," while another 31 percent say this is "hardly ever" or never the case. The remaining 31 percent say sexual issues are presented in an "informative or socially-responsible way" some of the time.

Many parents hold out hope, however, that television *could* play a more positive role in helping children learn about making responsible decisions about sex: 35 percent say television could have "a lot" of influence, and 43 percent say at least "a little." Twenty-one percent (21%) say there is no role for television in teaching children about sexual responsibility.

Although parents express concern about what their children see on television today, many find themselves unable to watch together, or to closely monitor their children's viewing. In fact, more than two-thirds (68%) say they only are able to watch television with their child at most half of the time. Most parents believe they know what their children are watching on television when they are not with them: 72 percent say they "usually" or "always" know. But, parents and children don't always agree on these estimates. In nearly a third of households (32%) the parent says they watch television with their child more frequently than their child says is the case, and in three out of ten (28%) households the parent is more likely to think they know what their child is watching than their child says they know. Parents attempt to monitor what their children see on television today by setting rules about TV watching: 85 percent say they have rules about which shows their child can and cannot watch, and 61 percent say they restrict the times of day when their child can watch.

Most parents have had to face the moment when something they consider "inappropriate" for their child to see comes up on television: 37 percent say this "often" happens when they watch with their child, and 47 percent say at least occasionally. In these situations, the vast majority (89%) take action of some kind. Most often parents go for the "clicker:" 54 percent change channels and 17 percent turn-off the TV. However, 38 percent say they have used the opportunity to talk with their child about what they saw.

Sometimes content on television presents an opening for parents to talk with their child about sexual issues. Nearly half of parents -- 45 percent -- say their child has at some point asked a question about sex, AIDS, or some other sensitive issue because of something they saw on TV.

Although the majority (60%) of parents have never heard of the "family hour" with regard to television programming, the concept resonates with most of them: three-quarters think that during the first hour of television programming, 8-9 p.m. in most regions of the country the networks *should* broadcast only shows that are appropriate for all ages. Even among Americans with no children under the age of 18 currently in the household, 70 percent say they think this should be the network's policy. Only 26 percent of parents think there are enough shows on now that are appropriate for their child; 72 percent say there are not enough.

1996 Kaiser Family Foundation/Children Now National Survey:
Parents Speak Up about Television Today

Conducted for The Henry J. Kaiser Family Foundation and Children Now
by Princeton Survey Research Associates

Questionnaire and Toplines

PARENT INTERVIEW I:
n = 421 (parents of children ages 8-12 only)

1. When your (AGE) year old (boy/girl) watches TV, how often do you watch WITH (him/her)-- usually, about half the time, only sometimes, or hardly ever?

4%	Always - VOLUNTEERED
28%	Usually
34%	Half the time
27%	Sometimes
7%	Hardly ever/Never
*	Don't know/Refused
100	

2. When (he/she) is watching TV and you're NOT with (him/her), about how often do you know WHAT (he/she) is watching-- usually, about half the time, only sometimes, or hardly ever?

72%	Usually/Always
13%	Half the time
7%	Sometimes
3%	Hardly ever/Never
4%	Always watch TV with child - VOLUNTEERED
1%	Don't know/Refused
100	

3. Does your family have specific rules about which times of day (he/she) can watch TV and which times of day (he/she) can't?

61%	Yes
39%	No
*	Don't know/Refused
100	

4. **IF YES TO Q. 3 ADD PHRASE IN PARENTHESES:** (During the times of day when (he/she) can watch TV,) Can (he/she) watch any show (he/she) wants, or are there some shows (he/she) is not allowed to watch?

11%	Can watch anything
85%	Some shows aren't allowed
2%	It depends - VOLUNTEERED
2%	Don't know/Refused
100	

5. In general, do you think there are enough programs on network television that are appropriate for your (AGE) year old (boy/girl), or not enough?

26%	Yes, enough
72%	Not enough
2%	Don't know/Refused
100	

6. When you are watching TV together, how often do you see things that you think are NOT appropriate for (him/her) -- often, sometimes, hardly ever, or never?

37%	Often
47%	Sometimes
13%	Hardly ever
2%	Never
1%	Don't know/Refused
100	

7. When you see something you think is inappropriate for (him/her), do you do anything in particular?

89%	Yes
9%	No
2%	Never see things that are inappropriate - VOLUNTEERED
*	Don't know/Refused
100	

IF YES:

8. What, specifically do you do?

Based on those that do something in particular; n= 375

54%	Change channel/station
17%	Turn off TV set
38%	Talk about it/discuss why program shouldn't be watched
3%	Cover the child's eyes
10%	Tell child to leave room
4%	Other
*	Don't know

Total exceeds one hundred percent due to multiple responses

9. How concerned are you that (he/she) is being exposed to too much **(INSERT ITEM)** in the TV shows (he/she) watches-- a great deal, somewhat, not too much, or not at all? How concerned are you that (he/she) is being exposed to too much **(INSERT SECOND ITEM. ROTATE ITEMS a AND b)** in the TV shows (he/she) watches-- a great deal, somewhat, not too much, or not at all?

	Great Deal	Some-what	Not too much	Not at all concerned	DK/ Refused	
a. Violent content	39%	36%	19%	5%	1%	=100
b. Sexual content	43%	28%	19%	10%	*	=100

10. Have you seen any changes in the way (he/she) talks, acts or dresses that you think are because of (his/her) exposure to sexual or violent content on TV shows?

19%	Yes
79%	No
2%	Don't know/Refused
100	

11. Has your (AGE) year old (boy/girl) ever asked you a question about sex, or AIDS, or some other sensitive subject because of something (he/she) saw on TV?

45%	Yes
53%	No
2%	Don't know/Refused
100	

12. Have you ever heard of the idea of "family hour programming" on television?

40%	Yes
58%	No
2%	Don't know/Refused
100	

13. Can you tell me WHAT this is and WHEN it is on?

Based on those who have heard of family hour programing; n= 168.

WHAT:

69%	Time devoted to programs appropriate for the whole family
17%	Some other response
14%	Don't know/Refused
100	

WHEN:

33%	First hour of network prime time (8-9 Eastern/Mountain/Pacific; 7-8 Central)
32%	Some other response
35%	Don't know/Refused
100	

14. Do you think that during the first hour of prime time programming, which is between 8 and 9 PM most places, the TV networks should ONLY broadcast shows that are appropriate for all ages, including children, OR do you think this is not necessary?

75%	Should only be appropriate for all ages
22%	Is not necessary
3%	Don't know/Refused
100	

CHILD INTERVIEW: n = 164 (10-12 year olds)

1. When you watch TV, about how often does your (PARENT INTERVIEWED) watch WITH you-- usually, about half the time, only sometimes, or hardly ever?

9%	Parent always watches TV with child
26%	Usually
29%	Half the time
25%	Sometimes
11%	Hardly ever/Never
*	Don't know/Refused
100	

1a.

30%	Parent and child agree (Q1 parent = Q1 child)
38%	Parent says they watch less often than child says (Q1 parent > Q1 child)
32%	Parent says they watch more often than kid child says (Q1 parent < Q1 child)
100	

2. When you watch TV alone or just with your brothers, sisters, or friends, about how often does your (PARENT INTERVIEWED) know WHAT you are watching-- usually, about half the time, only sometimes, or hardly ever?

53%	Usually/Always
14%	Half the time
20%	Sometimes
2%	Hardly ever/Never
9%	Parent always watches TV - VOLUNTEERED
2%	Don't know/refused
100	

2b.

45%	Parent and child agree (Q2 parent = Q2 child)
28%	Parent says they know more often than child says (Q2 parent > Q2 child)
24%	Parent says they know less often than child says (Q2 parent > Q2 child)
3%	Could not be determined
100	

PARENT INTERVIEW II:
n = 167 (parents of 8-12 year old only)

1. Thinking about shows that broadcast during the first hour of prime time and the sexual content in them, in your opinion, how often is this sexual content presented in an informative or socially responsible way?

10%Usually/always
20%Often
31%Sometimes
23%Hardly ever
8% Never
2% Never seen sexual content on these shows
6% Don't know
* Refused

2. How much effect do you think network television shows can have in helping children learn about making responsible decisions about sex?

35%A lot
43%A little
21%None at all
1% Don't know
* Refused
100